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ABSTRACT

A study investigated the stigma associated with not speaking a native language in a Hispanic community. Subjects were 288 male and female university students and staff, both Hispanic and non-Hispanic, in the San Diego (California) area. Two forms of a paper-and-pencil survey were administered to the subjects; one gave a stimulus figure, a Mexican male student named Juan, who spoke only English, while the other had the figure speaking both Spanish and English. Respondents answered questions concerning the stimulus figure's leadership, social status, communication skills, and educational potential. Results indicate that the Hispanic non-Spanish-speaker was felt to be less Hispanic than the bilingual Hispanic. Hispanic respondents felt that if Juan did not speak Spanish, he should not hold a leadership position in the Mexican-American community. All respondents felt that if Juan did not speak Spanish his social success was low, he was less Hispanic, his communication skills were low, and his intelligence was lower. Charts illustrating the results are appended. Contains four references. (MSE)

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Language Disloyalty and Stigmatism

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Presented at the 106th Annual Convention of the Americal Psychological Association at San Francisco. August 14, 1998 at 2-3:50 pm.

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Abstract

The relationship between language disloyalty and stigmatism was investigated and predicted Hispanics would denigrate Hispanic non-Spanish speakers. A 2x2 (monolingual-bilingual x Hispanic respondent non-Hispanic respondent) between subjects model was used. 288 unpaid male and female participants from the San Diego area were asked to evaluate a stimulus figure of Mexican descent who spoke English only or both English and Spanish. Stigmatism was measured using participants' survey responses. Results revealed Hispanics who do not speak Spanish were denigrated in the areas of leadership ability, social status, communication skills and education potential by both Hispanics and non-Hispanics alike. This study implies ethnic denigration can be avoided by learning one's ethnic language.

Introduction

The present study was designed to demonstrate the stigma associated with not speaking a native language. According to Driedger and Hengstenberg (1986), "scholars have devoted considerable attention to the relationship between language and ethnic identity of immigrant groups in multilingual settings and have frequently claimed that preservation and continued use of the traditional mother tongue is one important, if not the most important component of ethnic identity," (p.91).

Language is linked to ethnicity because it is the basic form of communication that expresses group loyalty, exchanges group ideas, and separates the group from others (Driedger & Hengstenberg, 1986; Hidalgo, 1986). Therefore, the desire of many linguistic groups around the world to maintain the ethnic language can be seen as a process, in which they compare themselves with dominant groups in society, and use language as a means to attain cultural cohesiveness (Bourhis & Giles, 1977).

It follows then, that the Spanish language is a means to assert Hispanic ethnic identity and implies speakers want to be favorably differentiated from the out-group. Further, the in-group distinctiveness of Spanish speakers provide a positive Hispanic social identity as well (Hidalgo, 1986; Bourhis & Giles, 1977; Giles et al., 1977). Therefore, it can be extrapolated that there would be resistance against Hispanics non-Spanish speakiers, people who do not speak their ethnic language at all. Thus, ethnic identity denigration is expected to occur as Mexicans (in-group of Spanish speaking Hispanics) perceive Spanish as a component of their group identity and may not identify with Mexican-Americans (Hidalgo, 1986) who do not speak Spanish.

Previous studies have focused on how non-ethnic language speakers view their situation; the individual's perception of the group, but have not focused on how the group views the non-ethnic language speakering individual. This study examines the relationship between language disloyalty and stigmatism in the Hispanic community in the areas of leadership disloyalty, social status, communication skills and education potential. The hypothesis predicts Hispanic non-Spanish speakers will be denigrated, particularly by other Hispanics.

Methods

Design

The experiment used a 2x2 between subjects design. One independent variable was the number of languages spoken by the stimulus figure (English or English and Spanish), and the second variable was the participant's ethnicity (Hispanic or non-Hispanic). The dependent variable was participant responses on an 11 item survey.

Participants

Subjects were 288 unpaid male and female students and staff predominantly from San Diego State University and students from Grossemont Junior College.

Materials

Two identical forms of an 11 question paper and pencil survey were administered; with the exeception that one form listed the stimulus figure as speaking English only while the alternate form listed the figure as speaking English and Spanish. Subjects were given a limited information describing "Juan", a student of Mexican descent. Subjects responded by using a five point Likert scale for 8 questions while 3 questions (on respondent ethnicity, ability to speak English and/or Spanish and perception of Juan's ethnicity) were answered using categorical options.

Procedure

Experimenters approached subjects in or near classrooms, ATMs, libraries and food courts and asked them to complete a short survey which were collected immediately after completion.

Results

Results supported the hypothesis that Hispanic non-Spanish speakers would be denigrated, while in-group denigration trends did not reach significance. Denigration was found in the evaluation of leadership ability, $F(1, 248)=5.18$, $p=.024$; social status, $F(1, 248)=51.63$, $p<.001$; communication skills, $F(1, 248)=89.52$, $p<.001$; and education potential, $F(1, 248)=8.57$, $p=.004$. Also, a Chi Square, $\chi^2(1, N=288)=6.66$, revealed participants catagorized Juan as less Hispanic when he spoke English only compared to the bilingual condition.

Conclusions

Results support the hypothesis that Hispanic non-Spanish speakers are denigrated. The ingroup of Hispanic respondents believed if "Juan" did not speak Spanish, he should not hold a leadership position in the Mexican-American community. In the area of social status, all respondents believed that if Juan did not speak Spainsh his sucess in social mixing is low, and he is considered less Hispanic even though he was described as a person of Mexican descent. Also, respondents believed Juan's lack of Spanish knowledge relegated his communication skills to be low even though the item did not specify communication with the ethnic group or his overall communication skills. In the area of educational potential, Juan's intelligence was rated lower when he did not speak Spanish. Findings support previous claims that language is an intergral part of the ethnic identity and the lack of language separates one from the ethnic mainstream and thus stigmatizes Juan.

The implication of this study is for the continuation of the push to learn one's ethnic language. Outside of the inherent value of learning one's ethnic language, the person will less likely encounter stigmatism in the areas of leadership ability, social status, communication skills and education potential by others and, in some instances, particularly by ingroup members. The person's ethnic identity will less likely be questioned and so, will be more acceptable to the ethnic community.

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Leadership Ability

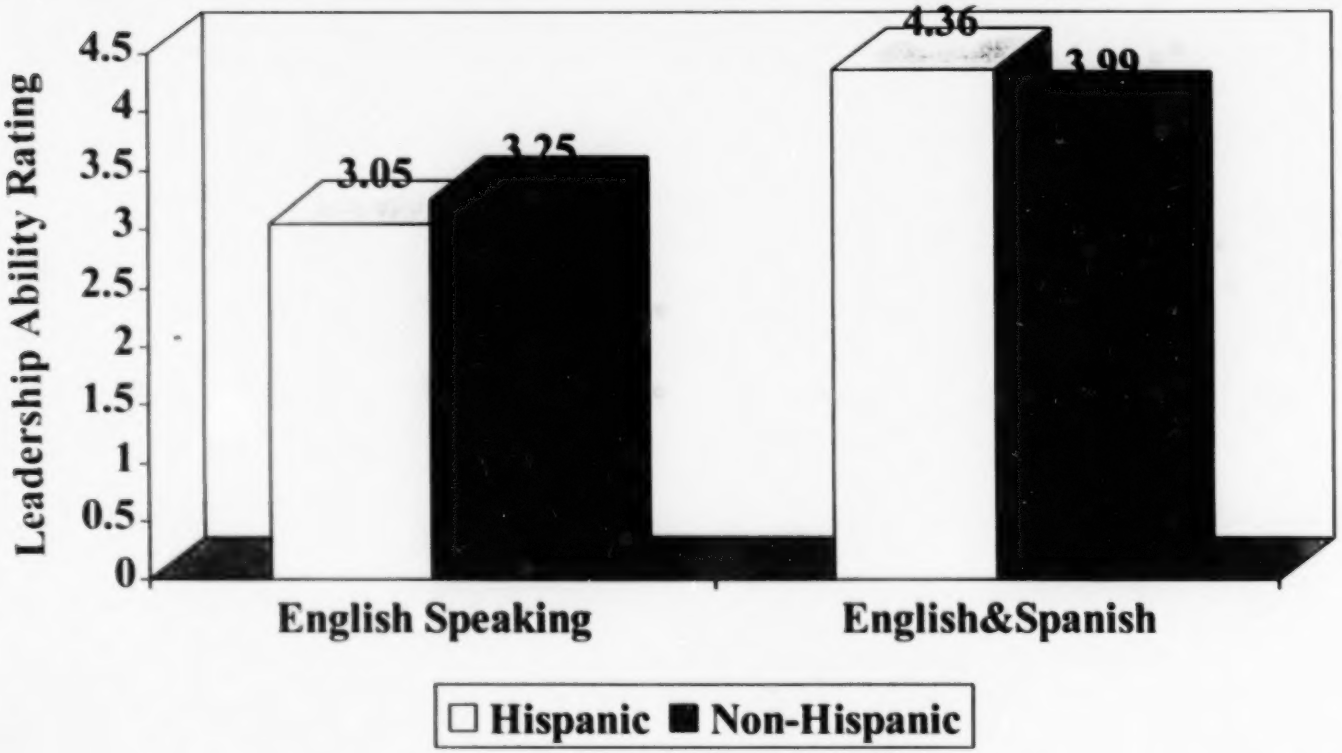

Figure 1. Mean Leadership Ability Ratings of English Speaking and English & Spanish Speaking Stimulus Figures by Hispanics and Non-Hispanics.

* Main Effect of Language Disloyalty $F(1, 284)=66.39$, $p<.001$

* Main Effect of Ethnicity $F(1, 284)=4.75$, $p=.032$

Social Status

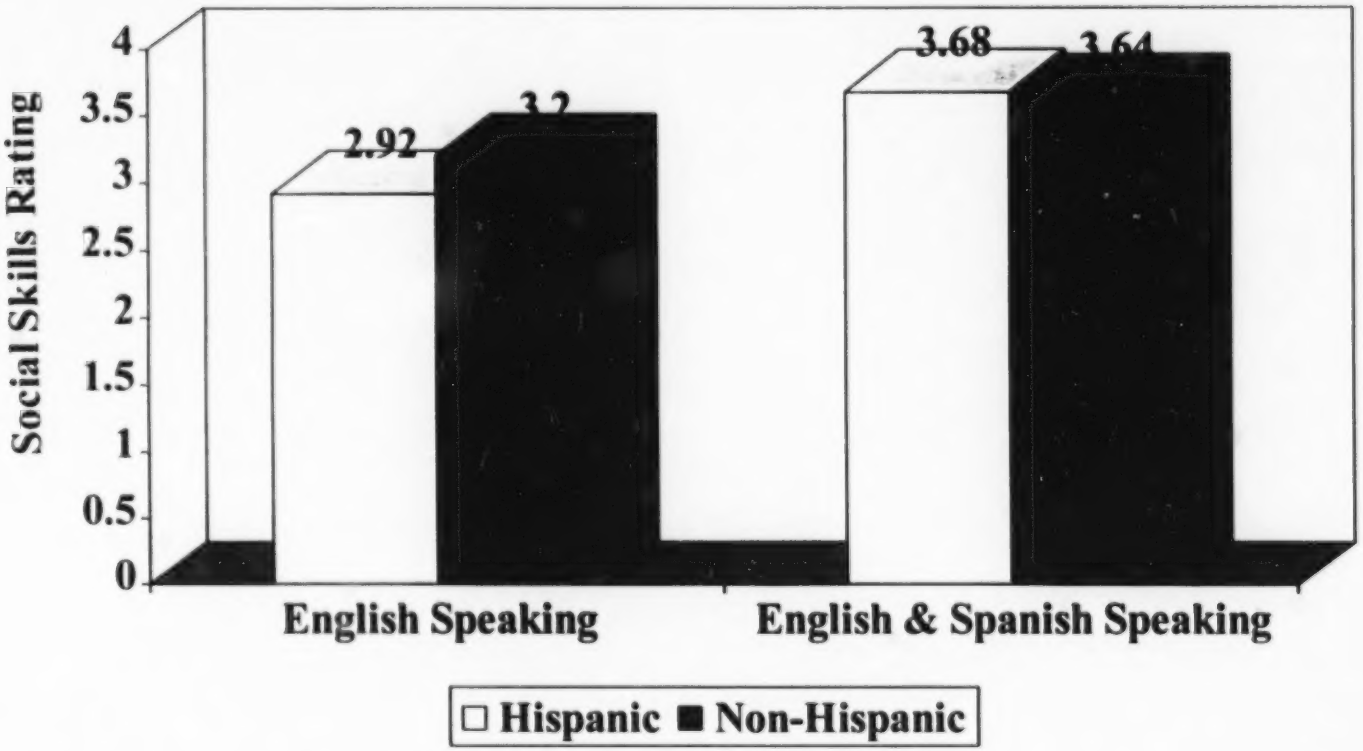

Figure 2. Mean Ratings of Ethnic Social Status of English Speaking and English & Spanish Speaking Stimulus Figures by Hispanics and Non- Hispanics.

* Main Effect of Language Disloyalty $\underline{F}(1, 284)=48.93$, $p<.001$

Communication Skills

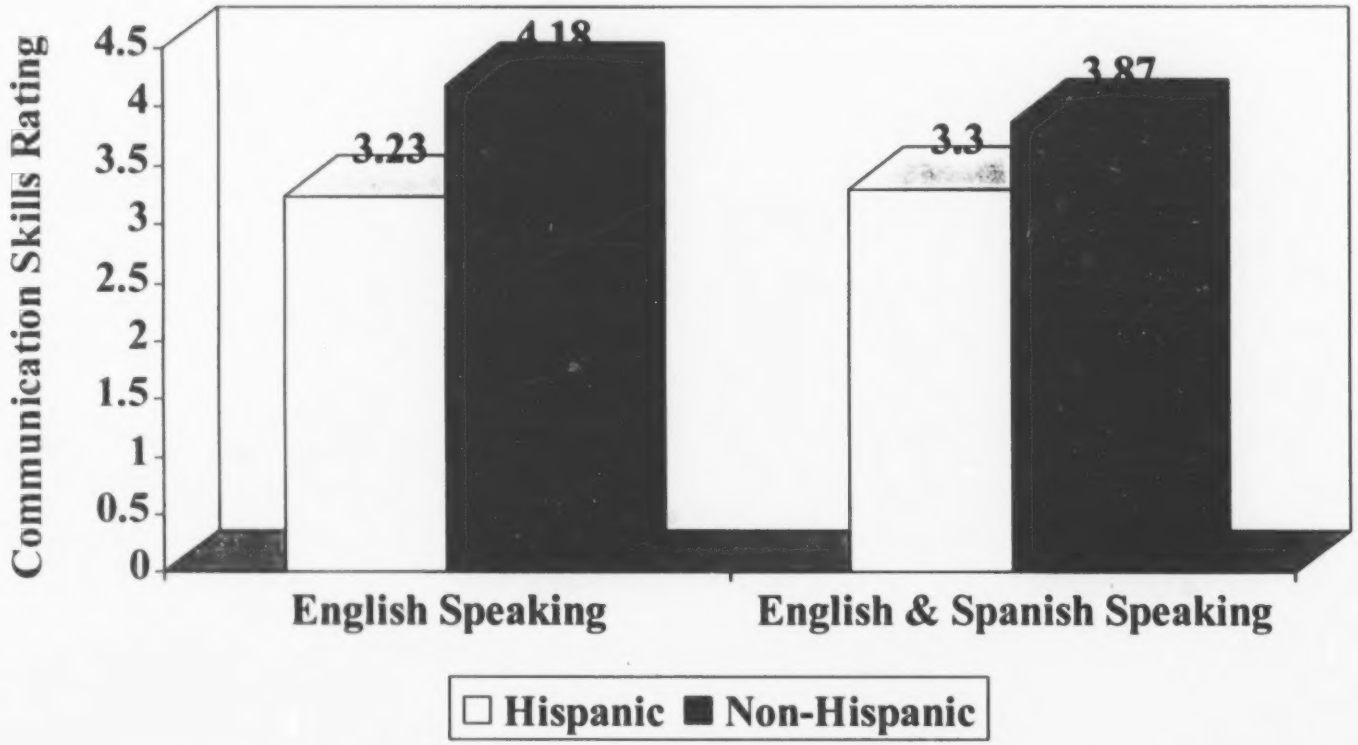

Figure 3. Mean Ratings of Communication Skills of English Speaking and English & Spanish Speaking Stimulus Figures by Hispanics and Non-Hispanics.

* Main Effect of Language Disloyalty $\underline{F}(1, 284)=89.52$, $p<.001$

Education Potential

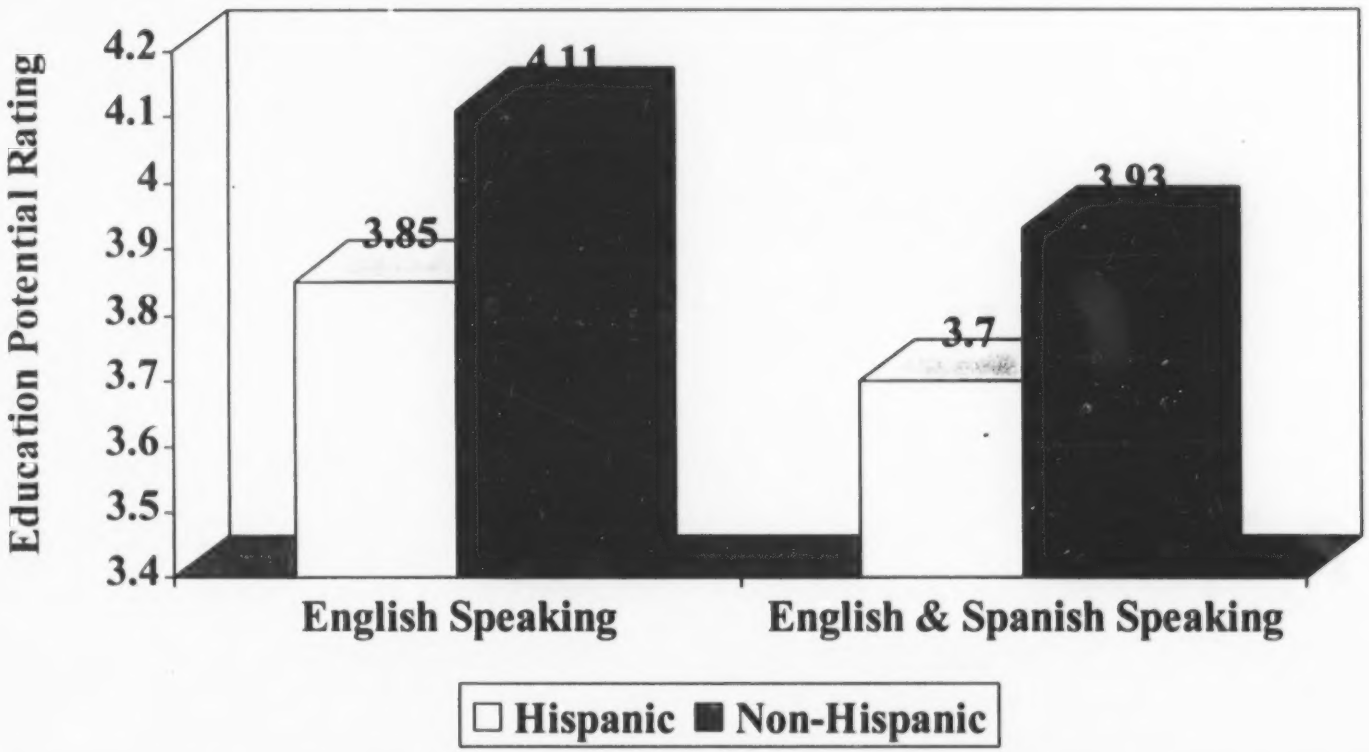

Figure 4. Mean Ratings of Education Potential of English Speaking and English & Spanish Speaking Stimulus Figures by Hispanics and Non-Hispanics.

* Main Effect of Language Disloyalty F(1, 284)=6.89, p=.014